

HOUSE OF FEAR



**MOVIE
MONSTERS**

HOUSE OF FEAR

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SUMMARY: After an actor is poisoned onstage and the body disappears, other mysterious events suggest that the theater conceals either his ghost or a clever murderer.

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PROLOGUE

Universal Studios released *The House of Fear* in 1939. The people who bought tickets probably thought they were going to see a horror film. They knew that most of the films with similar names took place in haunted houses. In addition, Universal was famous for movies about monsters, vampires, and werewolves.

The audiences must have been surprised. The action took place in a New York theater instead of in a creepy old house. But this isn't a common, everyday theater. First, an actor dies during a play. Then his body disappears! Ghostly voices make an appearance. Before long, no one wants to put on another play in the House of Fear.

Is the theater really haunted? Or is a very human murderer at work? The police think someone's putting on a good act. They don't believe in ghosts. But if there aren't any ghosts in the theater, who's making those scary noises? A detective named Arthur McHugh says he'll find out.

Are you ready for your trip through the House of Fear? Our story begins on opening night. John Woodford is starring in a new play. The house lights dim . . .

1. DEATH BRINGS DOWN THE CURTAIN

The opening night audience filled the Woodford Theater. Every seat had been sold weeks earlier. New York playgoers were eager to see the opening of John Woodford's new play.

The curtain went up to reveal a small radio station. Woodford was playing the part of a tough radio reporter. When the famous actor made his entrance, everyone clapped.

"Claire called again," Woodford's stage secretary told him. "She wants to talk to you about the Rawson story."

That was Alice Tabor's cue. The beautiful actress was playing the role of Claire. "Grant, talk to Mrs. Rawson and her son," she pleaded. "Once you tell their story on the air, everyone will think they're guilty. The family will be ruined!"

An older woman and a young man made their entrance. Sarah Henderson was playing Mrs. Rawson. Carleton was cast as her son. "Listen, Mr. Clark," Carleton begged. "I can explain —"

"It's too late!" Woodford roared. "My job is to broadcast the news, and this story is news. Now, clear out of here."

A red light flashed to show that it was air time.



Four talented actors open a new play at the Woodford Theater.

"This is Grant Clark," Woodford said, speaking into a microphone. "I've learned that Mrs. David Rawson and her son —"

Woodford's words were choked off. A look of pain and fear crossed his face. Then he clutched at his throat and fell to the floor. The audience fell silent. Was this part of the play?

A stagehand quickly lowered the curtain. Richard

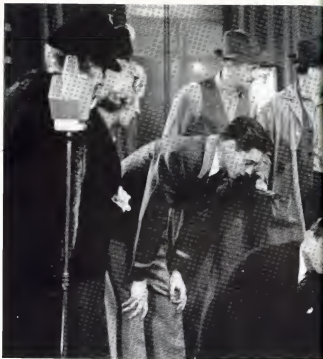


Actor John Woodford feels a terrible choking pain in his throat.

Pierce, the play's director, was the first to reach the fallen actor. He turned Woodford over and tried to find a pulse. Then he shook his head. "John is dead!" he announced.

"It can't be true!" Alice cried. Sarah put her arms around the sobbing actress and led her off to her dressing room.

Richard went out to tell the audience that the play



Director Richard Pierce tells the actors that Woodford is dead.

couldn't go on: People left quietly, stunned by the sudden tragedy. When Richard returned to the



stage, the actors were talking about Woodford.

"It might have been murder," Sarah said. "Lots of people hated John Woodford."



Alice nearly faints and has to lie down when she's told Woodford's death might be murder.

The theater's owner soon arrived. Joseph Morton had been watching from the box he shared with his playboy brother, Robert. Joseph's biggest worry seemed to be that the theater would lose money.

As the director, Richard was still in charge. "Mike! Jeff!" he called. "Carry Woodford's body to his dressing room."

The two stagehands were afraid to touch a dead man. "Get a move on!" Richard ordered. Police Officer Pitt ran in as Mike and Jeff were picking up the body. "Don't move him!" Pitt yelled.

Richard told Mike and Jeff to keep going. "This isn't a case for the police," he insisted.

"You'll all have to stay and answer questions,"

Pitt ordered. "I'll call the station and get the coroner down here." He looked at Mike. "Are you sure he's dead?"

As a prop man, Mike had seen many actors "die" on stage. "If he isn't dead," he muttered, "it's a great job of acting."

The police officer went off to phone the station. Mike and Jeff carried Woodford to his dressing room. They put him on a couch and covered him with a coat. Then they hurried away.

The rest of the cast gathered in Alice's dressing



Jeff and Mike put Woodford's body on a couch in his dressing room.

room. Carleton tried to comfort her, but she pushed him away. When Richard came in, she rushed into his arms.

As Carleton turned to go, he saw some flowers on the dressing table. The actor's eyes widened when he saw Woodford's writing on the card. The message read, 'Alice, I love you.' "Maybe Richard was jealous enough to kill his rival," he thought.

As soon as the coroner arrived, he headed for Woodford's dressing room. Officer Pitt pointed to the couch where Mike and Jeff had put the body. When the coroner picked up the coat, however, he found only a rolled up blanket. "There's no body here!" he snapped. "What is this, a bad joke?"

"I saw those two guys carry him in here," Pitt said. "A dead body can't walk away, can it?"

2. WOODFORD'S GHOST HAUNTS THE THEATER

The police detectives called in Richard Pierce to help them search for Woodford's body. The director looked as confused as they did.

"The dressing room has only one window and one door," Richard pointed out. "No one could get in or out through the bars that cover the window. That just leaves the door. If someone had dragged John out that way, one of us would have seen him."

Detective Brown turned to Joseph Morton. "I think this is a publicity stunt," he said, "and I don't like it."

Joseph denied the charge. "We don't need cheap publicity," he said. "The play is already sold out!"

The newspapers carried the story of Woodford's death and disappearance on page one. As the days passed, the headlines grew smaller. Finally, the story dropped out of the news entirely. Then a new headline appeared: WOODFORD'S GHOST HAUNTS EMPTY THEATER. The story said that people were hearing ghostly voices in the Woodford Theater.

A year passed. The ghost came back every time a new play went into rehearsals. Finally, Joseph had

to close the theater because actors refused to work there. A radio reporter picked up the story. "Today, only spiders and spooks live in the Woodford Theater," she told her audience. "The police are no longer interested in this year-old case."

The reporter was wrong about the police. Detective Arthur McHugh was developing a plan to solve the mystery. His first step was to pretend that he was a play producer. "Producer" McHugh called the Mortons and offered to lease the theater.

McHugh arranged to meet the owners at the Woodford. Joseph Morton led the way into the dark theater. "The lights aren't on yet," he grumbled. McHugh smiled and took out a flashlight.

A black cat hissed and ran across the stage. Robert Morton looked terrified, but McHugh only laughed. "I'll make that cat my mascot," he said. "I'll paint black cats on the curtains."



McHugh says he'll make the black cat his mascot.

Robert was surprised. "Don't theater people say that black cats bring bad luck?" he asked.

McHugh slapped Robert on the back. "Not in my theater," he chuckled. "I think people make their own luck, good or bad." Then he pointed to the spot where Robert was standing. "Isn't that where Woodford was killed?"

Robert jumped back three steps. "This place gives me the creeps," he said in a nervous voice. "It's okay for you to say you don't believe in ghosts, but —"

"I love ghosts!" McHugh roared. "It's the ghosts that will bring in the customers. That's why I'm going to put on Woodford's last play. I'll even hire the actors from the original cast."

McHugh paced back and forth as he talked. The Mortons looked on in amazement. "The public will love it!" McHugh bragged. He was really enjoying his role as producer. "Those ghost stories will mean sellouts at the box office."

"I hope you're right," Joseph said. "We tried to open a play after the tragedy, but it closed after one night. One of the actors made the mistake of looking through the keyhole of Woodford's dressing room. He saw John rolling around on the floor!"

"What happened next?" McHugh asked.

"The actor called for help," Joseph said. "Someone unlocked the door — but the room was empty!"

McHugh's big laugh echoed in the empty theater. "Your actor was probably drunk," he said as he led

the way to the office. "Come on, it's time to sign the lease."

The office was dusty and full of cobwebs. Joseph gave a sigh of relief when McHugh signed the lease. The phone rang and Robert picked it up. "It's for you," he said to McHugh.

"Hello," McHugh barked.

"This is John Woodford," a flat, hollow voice said. "Listen closely. Do not reopen my theater!" Then the line went dead.

"Somebody's playing a joke on me," McHugh said.

At that moment a telephone installer walked into the office. "I'm here to connect the phone," he said.

"Hey, I just talked to someone on this phone," McHugh told him. "I guess one of your buddies already hooked it up."

The installer checked the phone. "You didn't talk to anyone on this phone," he said. "It's as dead as a graveyard."

3. THE CAST AND CREW RETURN

The ghostly phone call was still on McHugh's mind when he returned to the police station. "Listen, Chief, the newspapers have laughed at us for a year," McHugh told his boss. "First we can't find the body, and then these ghost stories pop up. Why, the ghost even talked to me today!"

The Chief of Police looked as if his stomach hurt. He didn't want to add ghosts to his other worries.

"Right after I signed the lease, someone called me on a dead telephone," McHugh went on. "The voice said it was Woodford's ghost. I think someone's playing games to keep the theater closed. My guess is that it's a member of Woodford's old cast."

"McHugh, it's not enough to solve this case," the Chief sighed. "You better make a profit on that play, too. The mayor will kill both of us if we lose money on this crazy plan."

McHugh just smiled. Playing producer and putting the play together was fun. His smile faded later when he found Alice Tabor waiting at the theater.

Alice waved a newspaper in his face. "How dare you tell the papers that I'm going to star in your play?" she yelled. "Just because I played the part once, doesn't mean I'll do it again."

"Well, maybe I did go a little too far," McHugh said. "I thought that when you saw how much money I was offering —"

Alice cut him off. "Call the papers and tell them you made a mistake," she demanded. Then she stormed out of the office. Just as she reached the stage door, she met Richard Pierce.

"Alice! Why haven't you written to me?" Richard asked.

"I didn't dare," Alice explained. "The police kept asking questions about you and Woodford. I was afraid someone would think you killed him."

Richard's smile was tender. "So that's it!" he said. "Well, that's over now. Thanks to McHugh, we're together again."

Alice frowned. "Richard, I'm not going to do this play! If the old cast gets together, the trouble will start up again."

Richard put his arms around her. "Alice, I have to take this job," he said. "McHugh is the first producer who's offered me a chance to direct since the night John died."

Alice didn't want to lose Richard again. She went back to McHugh's office. "I've changed my mind," she said.

McHugh had her contract ready. After that it was easy. He soon had most of the old cast and crew signed to do the play.

A few days later, McHugh called for Mike and

Jeff. "Clean up Woodford's dressing room for Alice to use," he ordered.

"There're ghosts in there!" Jeff protested.

"Stop worrying about ghosts!" McHugh roared. "Get the key and clean up that dressing room!"

Alice came to Jeff's rescue. "Let's leave it locked," she said. "I don't want to use a dead man's dressing room." McHugh let Alice have her way. He sent Jeff to work on the lights.



McHugh tells the stagehands to stop worrying about ghost stories.

Just then, a dark-haired actress walked in. "I'm Gloria De Vere," she said. "I'm here to see about a part in your play."

McHugh liked Gloria's looks. "First, I have to warn you," he said. "Some people think this theater is haunted."

Gloria laughed. "All my problems are with live men," she said with a wink. "I don't have any time for dead ones."

McHugh hired her at once. He thought Gloria was perfect for the part of Grant Clark's secretary.

High over their heads, Jeff was working on the lights. When he stopped to rest, he noticed a grandfather's clock at the end of the catwalk. As he watched, the clock case slowly opened. A dead man was looking out at him!



Jeff thinks he's found Woodford's body inside a grandfather clock.

Jeff yelled and jumped back as the body fell forward. His foot slipped and he fell off the catwalk. He saved himself by grabbing a rope at the last second. "It's Woodford!" he screamed.

McHugh ran up the ladder to the catwalk. When he reached the body, he turned it over. The head came off in his hands!

"It's only a dummy!" McHugh called out. "Someone's trying to scare us, but it won't work." He laughed as he held up the dummy for everyone to see. "Now, go get some supper," he went on. "Be back in my office at eight o'clock to read through the script."

Robert Morton was talking to Gloria when McHugh climbed down from the catwalk. The detective was just in time to hear Gloria say, "I'd love to go to dinner with you, Mr. Morton."

The sight of Robert and Gloria walking out together made McHugh angry. He had been about to ask her out himself.



McHugh assures Richard and Mike that the "body" was only a dummy.

4. CAN GHOSTS START A FIRE?

The night wasn't going well for Arthur McHugh. After a lonely dinner, he returned to the theater in time to take a phone call from the Chief.

"You're spending too much money," the Chief scolded.

"Relax, I know what I'm doing," McHugh said in a soothing voice. A knock on the door gave him an excuse to hang up.

Sarah Henderson entered and shook McHugh's hand. "Sarah is perfect for the part of old Mrs. Rawson," McHugh thought. Behind her were the other cast members. Only Gloria was missing.

"Carleton will play Woodford's part," McHugh announced. The young actor bowed slightly. He was happy to be the star.

"Aren't you afraid of Woodford's ghost?" Sarah asked.

"Smart people don't believe in ghosts," Carleton told her.

McHugh didn't want to waste any more time. "Richard, why don't you get the scripts from the file cabinet," he asked.

While they waited, Carleton moved closer to Alice. "I'm glad you're playing my girl friend," he



Alice turns away from the eager Carleton and smiles at Richard.

whispered. "That means we'll be spending a lot of time together. Why don't we start with a late supper tonight?"

Alice cut him off. "I'm sure I won't be hungry," she said.

Richard had finished passing out the scripts. He pulled Alice away. "I've got an even better idea, Carleton," he said. "Stay away from Alice completely!"

Carleton's eyes burned with rage. "You're jealous of me, just like you were jealous of Woodford!" he snapped. "Maybe you were jealous enough to murder him!"

Gloria walked in before Richard could reply. "Sorry I'm late," she said with a bright smile.

After Gloria was seated, Richard explained the

plot. "The play is about a radio reporter," he said. "Grant Clark will do anything to become famous, even if it hurts people."

Richard opened his script and flipped through the pages. "The pages are all blank!" he cried.

"That script was okay this morning," McHugh said. He could see that the others were frightened. "Never mind," he said in a soothing tone. "Just read from your own copies of the script."

Alice gasped when she opened her script. She held up a slip of paper. "'Don't play this part. Signed — John Woodford.'" she read. The others found the same warning in their scripts.

McHugh tried to laugh it off. "I've heard of ghost-writing, but this takes the cake," he joked.

"Wait a minute," Richard said. "It's not that simple. These notes are written in Woodford's handwriting!"

Gloria saw something else to worry about. She grabbed McHugh's arm and pointed. White smoke was pouring into the room from under the door.

McHugh tried the door, but it was bolted shut from the outside. Quickly, he stood on a chair and smashed open the skylight. Then he climbed out and ran around to the stage door. Outside the office, he found a pile of burning rags on the floor. He stamped out the flames and opened the door. "Okay, come on out," he called.

"That's one more close call," Alice said. "How much longer will it be before one of us gets killed?"

5.

WOODFORD'S GHOST IS EVERYWHERE

Despite Alice's fears, the next few days passed quietly. Rehearsals went smoothly. Then the trouble started again.

Maybe Gloria was at fault. She came in wearing a hat trimmed with peacock feathers. Mike yelled, "Feathers are bad luck!"

Gloria didn't care. "I won't take them off," she told Mike. She turned away and walked past Jeff, who was standing on a stepladder. As he reached down to cut the feathers from her hat, Jeff fell off the ladder. Luckily, he wasn't badly hurt.

Carleton was McHugh's next problem. "I've received some more warning notes," the actor said. "I think Richard's sending them."

"Why would he do that?" McHugh wondered.

"He's jealous because I have some love scenes with Alice," Carleton said. He lowered his voice. "You probably don't know this, but Richard hated Woodford. They had a fight the night Woodford was killed."

McHugh filed away that information. Then he called the cast together to run through the first act. As the scene moved along, Carleton stepped to the microphone. Before he could speak, Woodford's

voice sounded over the public address system. "This is Grant Clark," the voice boomed.

"That's Woodford!" Carleton cried. "He's speaking his lines just like he did the night he died."

The voice went on and on. "It must be a recording," McHugh thought. He ran to the control room. There he found a record spinning on a turntable. Angrily, he switched it off.

"Who did this?" he thundered.

Jeff stepped forward. "I found the record in a drawer," he admitted. "I wanted to hear Woodford's voice once more. But I didn't know you'd hear it out in the theater."

"Stick to business!" McHugh told Jeff. Then he called the cast back to the stage. "Okay," he said. "Let's get on with —"

McHugh never finished the sentence. A rope broke, sending a heavy prop crashing down toward the stage. McHugh and Richard jumped out of the



Carleton and Mike are scared when a prop staircase crashes down.

way just in time. From high above, a mad laugh echoed through the theater. Then there was only silence.

McHugh sent the actors home. He knew they wouldn't get any more work done that night. Richard was the last to leave.

"Maybe you should cancel the play," Richard suggested.

McHugh shook his head. "No, I'm not going to give up," he said. "In fact, I'm going to stay in the theater tonight. If the ghost shows up again, I'll be ready for him."

Richard started to leave, but McHugh grabbed his arm. "Stay with me," he ordered. "If I don't catch this ghost, you could be in trouble. I've heard about your fight with Woodford."

"Okay, you win," Richard said. "What's your plan?"

McHugh pointed to the box seats on each side of the stage. "We can see the whole theater from those boxes," he said. "I'll stay in one, you stay in the other. If you hear anything, signal with this flashlight. I'll be waiting with a gun in my hand."

The two men settled down to wait. The theater was dark and silent. A distant clock struck twelve.

6. THE BODY IN THE WALL

The minutes dragged by. McHugh almost fell asleep in the dark theater. Suddenly, his eyes opened wide. A soft, glowing light was floating above the stage.

McHugh felt a chill run down his spine. The light was taking shape. "It's a mask of John Woodford's face!" he cried.

The glowing mask seemed to be heading for his box. "Stay where you are or I'll shoot!" McHugh called out. The mask kept moving toward him. McHugh raised his gun and fired twice. The mask tilted to one side and then the light faded.

McHugh fumbled his way to the light switch. When he looked at the other box, Richard was staggering to his feet. A trickle of blood was running down his face.

"Something hit me," Richard called. "I must have been out for a while. What happened? I didn't see anything."

A search of the stage turned up some small splinters. Then they heard a crash from Woodford's dressing room. The key was missing, but McHugh and Richard forced the door open. The remains of a large mask lay scattered across the floor.

"We had the door covered and the window is barred," McHugh said. "That means our friend must have used a secret passage."

The detective began tapping on the wall. "Maybe the police didn't look hard enough after Woodford's body vanished," he explained. "I'm going to stay here until I find a way out."

McHugh tapped his way along the wall. Nothing happened. Then he leaned on an old drain pipe, and a hidden door swung open! With Richard close behind him, McHugh stepped into the passage. The flashlight showed rough plaster walls. They squeezed past a bulge in the wall and reached another door.

The second door opened into Alice Tabor's dressing room. Just as they opened the door, Alice came in.

"Alice! What are you doing here?" Richard asked. "I realized you hadn't left the theater," she said. "I was afraid something was wrong, so I came back." She saw the blood on his face. "You're hurt! What went wrong?" she cried.

McHugh picked up a key from the floor. "That's the missing key to Woodford's dressing room," he said. "How did it get here?"

"I have no idea," Alice replied.

McHugh was tired of playing games. "You might as well know," he said. "I'm a police detective. I think you two know something about the murder of John Woodford. Either tell me the truth or I'll take you down to the police station."



McHugh suspects Alice and Richard of involvement in the murder.

"Woodford always put his leading lady in this dressing room," Alice told him. "That way he could sneak over to see her without anyone knowing about it. I admit that Richard told Woodford to stay away from me. But he didn't kill him!"

McHugh decided to believe her. "Okay, go home now. And don't tell anyone that I'm a detective," he ordered.

After they left, McHugh examined every inch of the passage. A hard tap on the strange bulge broke

off some plaster. McHugh looked into the hole he'd made and felt sick. Sealed into the wall was a mummified body!

The police doctor came quickly when McHugh called him. His work didn't take long. "You're right, that's John Woodford," the doctor said when he finished. "What should we do now?"

"Seal up the wall," McHugh decided. "I want to keep this a secret as long as possible."

7. THE GHOST FINDS ANOTHER VICTIM

A week later, McHugh looked outside the theater and smiled. People were waiting in line to buy tickets. On stage, the cast was getting ready for the final dress rehearsal.

Joseph Morton shook McHugh's hand. "It looks as though we're really going to open," the theater owner said with a smile. "All that's missing now is my playboy brother," he added.

Robert walked in just then. Gloria was holding tightly to his arm. "Joseph," Robert said, "I want you to meet Gloria De Vere. You're going to be seeing her often from now on."

Joseph frowned. "I don't think so, Robert," he said. Then he turned to Gloria. "If you're thinking of marriage, forget it," he snapped. "Any girl who marries Robert without my okay will have to go hungry." He left without waiting for an answer.

Gloria turned to Robert. "What did he mean?" she asked.

"My dear brother thinks he controls the family's money," Robert said carelessly. "Don't worry your pretty head about it. That's all going to change."

McHugh had heard enough. He sent Robert away and told Gloria to put on her costume. Then he



Joseph tells Gloria that she'll never marry his playboy brother.

turned to see Carleton rushing toward him.

"I'm quitting!" the actor yelled. "I just found another note from Woodford. 'This one says I'll die if I go on stage tomorrow.'"

McHugh ripped up the note. "You're not really afraid of a ghost, are you?" he laughed. "Besides, you can't walk out now. I don't have time to rehearse another actor to take your part."

Carleton still looked worried. "It's no use. I'm done —"



Carlton threatens to quit when he receives another death threat.



McHugh put his arm around the actor. "Here's what I'll do," he cut in. "I'll hire a bodyguard for you. He'll protect you every minute you're in the theater."

Carleton seemed to like the idea, so McHugh went on. "How many actors have bodyguards? Everyone will say that you're one of the biggest stars on Broadway after this."

With Carleton happy again, McHugh settled down to watch the rehearsal. Disaster struck almost at once. Every light in the theater went out. "Is everyone okay?" McHugh called. A babble of nervous voices came back, but no one asked for help. McHugh swore under his breath and called for Jeff to fix the lights.

Then a scream cut through the darkness. "Help! Help me!" Carleton cried. After that, there was only silence.

Jeff finally got the lights turned on. McHugh ordered a search of the theater, but no one could find Carleton. Finally Jeff remembered something. He had been about to lower the set for the radio studio when the lights went out.

The set came down slowly. As Jeff tied the ropes, he saw what seemed to be a body in the fake control room. "Another dummy," he said with a grin. He

walked to the set and shoved the figure off its chair. Then he took a second look and screamed.

Everyone came to see what was wrong. McHugh bent down and examined the body. "It's Carleton," he said grimly. "He's dead!"

The actors drew back, their faces fearful. Alice spoke first. "McHugh," she said softly, "who's going to die next?"



The ghost strikes again! Carleton is found dead during rehearsal.

8. THE SHOW MUST GO ON

The next death threat arrived the following morning. This one was addressed to McHugh. It read, "Someone else will die if you open tonight. This is your last warning."

McHugh called the police station. "I'm opening tonight, no matter what," he told the Chief. "I want two dozen of our best officers here. We've got to put a stop to these murders."

The Chief had some news. "Carleton died of a quick-acting poison," he said. "So far, we haven't figured out how the poison got into his body. What's certain is that you've got a real murderer on your hands. Ghosts don't use poison to kill people."

Richard and Alice were waiting when McHugh put down the phone. They wanted to quit the play. "With Carleton dead, we can't open anyway," Richard said. "We don't have a leading man."

"I want you to play Carleton's role," McHugh told Richard. "You're the only one who can do it." He showed them the latest note. "Besides, I'm the one the murderer plans to kill tonight. This is our chance to catch him."

Despite Alice's protests, Richard agreed to McHugh's plan. As director, he already knew all the

parts by heart. He went off with Alice to practice his lines.

A police handwriting expert arrived. "I've checked the notes against writing samples from everyone in the cast and crew. None of them match," the expert reported. "But I did find something interesting. The writing is the same as the signature on Woodford's last paycheck — and that was a forgery!"

McHugh looked puzzled. "What does that mean?" he wondered.

"My guess is that someone was cashing Woodford's checks, and he found out," the expert said. "He probably threatened to expose the forger if the money wasn't returned."

"Right!" McHugh exclaimed. "The guy couldn't come up with the money, so he killed Woodford to keep him quiet."

By now, McHugh was ready to suspect anybody. He told the handwriting expert to compare the writing samples again. Then he sent his detectives to watch everyone.

Jeff came in to report that Gloria wasn't feeling well. McHugh hurried to her dressing room, but Gloria wasn't sick. She was drunk! When she saw him, she held up a diamond bracelet.

"Robert gave me a little present," she laughed. "He's going to take me away from this moldy, two-bit theater."

"Did you fall for that old line?" McHugh said angrily.

Gloria held up a letter. "I have it in writing, smart guy!"

McHugh grabbed the letter and told Jeff to bring Gloria some coffee. Then he gave Robert's letter to the handwriting expert.

It was almost time for the play to begin. As people took their seats, they noticed the police. "The real action might not be on stage tonight!" one playgoer told his date.

Every member of the cast and crew was being guarded. Even the Mortons had a detective sitting behind them in their box. The Chief took his seat and looked around at the big audience. "Maybe we'll make some money on this after all," he thought.

Backstage, the callboy gave the two-minute warning. Alice, Sarah, and Richard waited in the wings. Gloria took her place on stage. The coffee seemed to have worked wonders for her.

The house lights dimmed and the curtain rose.

9.

**"THERE'S A MURDERER
IN THE THEATER!"**

McHugh was watching from the wings. He was enjoying the play, but then he felt a hand on his arm.

"The coroner just found a small glass needle in Carleton's body," Sergeant O'Brien reported. "The killer must have dipped the needle in poison and then shot him with it."

Another hand tugged at McHugh. "Woodford died during this scene," Alice whispered. "He was speaking into the microphone."

McHugh studied the mike. Suddenly, he turned to O'Brien. "Stage mikes don't need power," he said, "but there's a wire leading from that mike to a hole in the stage. Go under the stage and check it out. That mike is hooked up!"

O'Brien crawled under the stage. Just as he reached the wire, a masked figure jumped on his back. The sergeant fought back, but a blow on the head knocked him out. Then the man waited, listening to the play. His hand tightened on a switch.

The sounds of the fight warned McHugh that Richard might be in danger. He ran out and kicked the microphone over. The poisoned needle whizzed by the actor's ear.

McHugh turned to the audience. "There's a murderer in the theater," he yelled. "Stay in your seats, please."



McHugh tells the audience that there's a murderer in the theater.



McHugh directs the search for the men who tried to kill Richard.

With three detectives behind him, McHugh ran to the area below the stage. Just as he arrived, the masked man scrambled up a ladder. "There's your 'ghost,'" McHugh called. "Go get him!"

The police searched the backstage area. Finally, they found the masked man hiding on a catwalk. Two officers cornered him and hustled him back to the stage. McHugh pulled off the mask.

"Look! It's Mike, the property man," Richard said.

"Mike, I know you killed Woodford and Carleton," McHugh said. "I also know you've got a prison record. That all adds up to the electric chair. But maybe you can save your skin if you tell me who's behind this."

"I don't know anything," Mike mumbled.

"Someone was threatening to expose you as an ex-con," McHugh insisted. "That same person forced you to become a killer."

Mike broke down. He pointed at Robert Morton. "It was he! It started when he forged Woodford's check and made me cash it."

"That's a lie!" Robert shouted.

"No, it's the truth," McHugh said. "The letter Robert sent to Gloria will prove that he wrote all those warning notes, too. I also think Mike played the ghost — but Robert wrote the script."

Gloria dropped her role as an actress. "I'm really Mrs. McHugh, Robert," she said. "We began to



Captured after a wild chase, the "ghost" is about to be unmasked.

suspect you after you bragged about all the money you were going to make."

McHugh turned to Joseph. "This theater is the key to a big real estate deal," he explained. "If Robert could keep the theater empty and the price low, he'd clean up. After he and Mike killed Woodford, he invented the ghost stories. Then he had Carleton killed to keep us from opening tonight."

The Chief hugged McHugh as the murderers were led away. "Great work!" he said. "You've solved the case and we've got a hit show! We'll be making plenty of money for the police fund."

McHugh looked puzzled. "Didn't you get my letter?" he asked. "I'm leaving the force. I'm a Broadway producer now!"

The ex-detective put his arm around his wife. "Okay, let's go," he called to the actors. "We've still got a play to put on."

THE END

HOUSE OF FEAR

During a Broadway play, an actor is mysteriously killed. The theater owners are forced to close because they think that the theater has become haunted. Then a hard-hitting New York police detective decides to pose as a new producer. He has the cast re-enact the play, in hopes of finding a clue to the mystery.



MOVIE MONSTERS

CRESTWOOD HOUSE